

University of Groningen

An analysis of action ideas in early parenting

Robijns, Fokelien Sietske

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

1998

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Robijns, F. S. (1998). An analysis of action ideas in early parenting. s.n.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Summary

Ideas about children and how they develop are a topic of interest to parents and to researchers. The present manuscript describes a series of studies about parents' strategies for handling their child's behaviour and stimulating their development.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the main steps in the research. It sets out the aims of the research step by step; the reasons for the design of each step and explains how the different steps hang together.

Chapter 2 sets out to disentangle the conceptual complexity which emerges in studying parental ideas. It distinguishes three main classes of the contents of parents' ideas. Attitudes about children refer to the values employed and the developmental goals to be achieved in child-rearing, e.g. what do parents want their children to be or do. Attributions or parents' ideas about developmental processes refer to the explanations they give for their child's behaviour and development. Strategies refer to parent's ideas about how to influence the behaviour or knowledge of children. These different classes of parents' ideas are likely to be interrelated in complex ways and this makes it difficult to disentangle the function which each of these may have in parental thinking.

The present research is concerned with parents' action ideas: the things one thinks one can do to rear a child or to stimulate its development. Conceptually these ideas are highly related to strategies. Because action ideas are most likely to be of interest to parents (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Segal, 1985; Showers, 1989), the development of a means of studying and explaining such ideas forms the focus of the studies described in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 examines the methods used in present-day studies. Structured interviews, card-sorting approaches, the use of parent-child interaction situations (vignettes) and questionnaires, are discussed. All appear to offer their own advantages for the study of parental ideas.

In order to select the most suitable approach for the present series of studies, it was necessary to consider the broader conceptual framework in which studies of parental action ideas should be seen. These considerations focussed our attention upon implicit theories and cognitive networks, both of which account for basic characteristics of human cognition, such as extensivity and complexity, while allowing for varying degrees of

Summary

conscious acc
balanced use
analysis (Live
1987; Weber,
framework in
approaches in
questions abou
the majority o
parents?; whic
them?; to what

Chapter
which could b
parental ideas.
parental verbal
tory resulted in
action ideas w
of action ideas
overlap in som

Chapter
ideas: the relat
all aspects of p
ideas need to
offering enoug
range of child
card-sorting ap
importance of
of important id
behaviour and
represented. T
differ from the

Chapter
transparent lis
between the i
behaviour. The
were identifie
pedagogues so

Cluster-a
could be furth

conscious accessibility and interrelations between ideas. An integrated and balanced use of implicit theory analysis (Sternberg, 1987) and content-analysis (Livesley en Bromley, 1973; Peevers en Secord, 1973; Jackson, 1987; Weber, 1990) takes these basic characteristics of the conceptual framework into account. In view of this, it was decided to use these approaches in a series of studies which were designed to explore four main questions about action ideas: which action ideas are likely to be relevant for the majority of parents?; how are these ideas organised in the minds of parents?; which kinds of child-rearing situations are likely to be relevant to them?; to what extent do parents differ and agree about these topics?.

Chapter 4 describes the generation of a basic list of action ideas, which could be used for further research on the range, scope and focus of parental ideas. The list was compiled by means of a content-analysis of parental verbalisations in a wide range of magazines and books. The inventory resulted in 261 action ideas. The main conclusions were that parental action ideas were likely to cover an extensive conceptual field, that the list of action ideas was likely to be too unwieldy and that there was evidence of overlap in some of the ideas.

Chapter 5 explores two features of the relevance of the 261 action ideas: the relative importance of each of the ideas and the extent to which all aspects of parental action ideas are represented in the list of ideas. The ideas need to allow a structured approach in interviewing parents, while offering enough variability to suit individual perspectives on the broad range of child-rearing processes in the family in general. By means of a card-sorting approach, parents and professional care-givers indicated the importance of each of the 261 action ideas. Tentative inspection of the list of important ideas showed that actions concerned with correcting the child's behaviour and with explicit developmental stimulation tended to be under-represented. The results showed that parents seem to favour ideas which differ from the preferences of care-givers.

Chapter 6 describes a study which aimed at defining a clear and transparent list of action ideas, in which the structures of the relations between the ideas express the underlying meaning in terms of parental behaviour. The main research material consisted of the action ideas which were identified as relevant in the previous study. Psychologists and pedagogues sorted these ideas into groups on the basis of their meaning.

Cluster-analysis revealed a latent structure of six clusters, which could be further organised in three sets of pairs forming the categories:

"controlling behaviour" covering the clusters "offering structure" and "steer the child", "responsive behaviour" - "warmth" and "enhancing emotional climate", "developmental focus" - "teach the child" and "offering opportunities for self-development". The data seemed to indicate that, in their spontaneous utterances, parents were likely to make use of action ideas in the regions of warmth and of steering the child, while psychologists and pedagogues were more likely to employ ideas of all six clusters. There were also indications that, in relation to developmental focus, parents tended to see self-developmental opportunities as important, while care-givers were more likely to appreciate teaching actions.

Chapters 7 and 8 discuss a study which had two specific aims in mind. The first was to explore three features of parents' implicit theories of action ideas: parents' view of the latent structure of the ideas, their evaluations of the importance of the different groups of ideas (chapter 7) and the underlying meaning of the list of ideas in the context of real-life parent-child interactions (chapter 8). The second aim was to explore differences in parents' implicit theory of action ideas with respect to the age of the child: young children of about 3 years-of-age and older ones of about 7.

The study was performed using a structured interview. First, parents sorted 42 action ideas into meaningful groups and each of the groups was given a cluster-name. Secondly, parents were asked to show the relative importance of each of the groups of action ideas. The third step involved discussion about six vignettes and about a parental example of each of the vignette. The vignettes consisted of general descriptions of conflict situations, handling the child's emotions and developmental focus, for instance: a child wants to have its own way and you as a parent are not in agreement. In these discussions the parents applied the action ideas.

The results showed that parents' latent structure of action ideas for young children very much resembled the structure of both the group of parents with older children and that found earlier with psychologists and pedagogues (chapter 6). In both age-groups "warmth" was seen as of most importance; "correcting the child" and "explicit stimulation" as of least importance. For young children "offering opportunities for self-development" seemed to be more important than "offering structure", while for older children the rank-order between these two clusters was to be reversed.

Desp
important
warmth act
older child
to real-life
agreement
was found

Chap
term goals
description
description
structure. F
ideas which
(chapters 7

The
useable for
part of the
more goals
and teachi
education
functional
with the la
to organis
be reached

Cha
and the b
the meth
effective
rearing si
of parent
research
parents. I
vignettes

It s
identified
structure
responsi
child's d

Despite the fact that warmth was generally regarded as the most important cluster, in specific situations parents tended to choose non-warmth actions as more important. Parents of young children and those of older children alike often tended to agree in their reactions to vignettes and to real-life interaction situations with children. Notwithstanding the agreement on a group-level, in both age-groups the variation among parents was found to be large.

Chapter 9 discusses the meaning of the action ideas in terms of short-term goals. The study used a questionnaire, which contained six descriptions of short-term goals (such as: what to do to teach a child). One description was used for each of the clusters identified in the latent structure. Parents chose one of these descriptions for each of the 42 action ideas which had also been used in the card-sorting study with parents (chapters 7 and 8).

The results of the study showed that a large part of the ideas were useable for the goal expressed in the cluster-description concerned. A large part of the ideas was also likely to be multi-functional: useable for two or more goals which differed clearly from each other, e.g. offering structure and teaching the child. The results provided some evidence that level of education is of influence upon the perceived useability of the multi-functional action ideas. Comparing the perceived useability of the ideas with the latent structure of action ideas, it seemed that parents were likely to organise parental actions with respect to the child-rearing goal which can be reached through the action.

Chapter 10 discusses the appropriateness of the present methodology and the broader implications of the results of the studies. It is argued that the methodology which was developed for the present studies is an effective means of examining parents' ideas about their behaviour in child-rearing situations. It seems to be sensitive to the variation and complexity of parental thinking and to offer a flexible combination of objectivity of the research approach with elicitation of personal and subjective notions of the parents. Furthermore, there are clear indications that the action ideas and vignettes used are relevant for parents.

It seems that each of the categories of parental behaviour which were identified, is also studied in the broader literature. The patterns in the latent structure of action ideas seem to suggest that not only control and responsiveness but also the category of appropriate stimulation of the child's development is likely to be needed in theory building about parent-

child interaction. Furthermore, the discrimination of the six clusters of parental behaviour may extend our thinking about the nature of daily parent-child interaction situations. In each of the three categories of parental behaviour the clusters seem to represent the distinction between a cluster which describes immediate actions within a particular situation and a cluster which concerns the ongoing context of family life. It seems feasible that making a clear distinction between the features of immediacy and context will yield insight into the dynamics of child development within the family.

The variation among parents was found to be large, in the complexity of their latent structure, in evaluations about what is important and in the specific solutions chosen for daily parent-child interaction situations. It seems likely that different features of the specific situation of the parent account for variation among parents. These include: personal experience as a parent, conscious familiarity with a particular subject, perceived responsibilities as a parent, the developmental phase of the child, the specific situation at hand. All of these are likely to influence one's implicit action theories.

Samen

Ideeën over
ouders en o
naar strateg
beïnvloeder

Hoof
onderzoek.
redenen vo
stappen sam

Hoof
bestuderen
inhoudelijk
Attitudes o
voeding na
kinderen z
ontwikkelin
het gedrag
ideeën van
kunnen beï
waarschijnl
te ontwarre
ouders.

Het
de dingen
om diens
gerelateerd
van belang
Showers,
bestuderen
opeenvolgt

Hoc
methodes.
gebruik v
worden b
bestuderen